



# Political Parties

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The political parties are not mentioned in the Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark, which is the framework of the Danish political system. But nevertheless, the parties do play an important role in political life. The rules of and the conditions for political activities in Denmark, as in many other countries, are more than just the basic, written rules of the Constitutional Act. Tradition, practical considerations and the general development of society greatly contribute to laying down the conditions of political life.

There are several ways of having an effect on and possibly influencing events. A party can put forward candidates for election to the Danish Parliament, the municipal councils, or the county councils and obtain direct influence there. But a party can also act as a pressure group outside the elected bodies by writing articles in newspapers, by holding meetings, or by bringing their points of view before of the public in other ways.

## Parties in the nineteenth century

When the Constitutional Act was adopted in 1849, Denmark got its first democratic Parliament, the **Rigsdag**, consisting of the Folketing and the Landsting. At that time, there were no parties. In 1849, people were not expected to express their views through parties but via individuals who were elected solely on the basis of their personal qualities and points of view.

Gradually, the Members who shared the same attitudes began to form clubs in which they met and held discussions. Initially, the clubs were only loosely organised but they gradually became more stable and formed the basis of the parties that appeared about 1870. **The Conservatives** (originally the Party of the Right) and the Liberal Party (originally the United Liberal Party) both originated in such clubs in the Rigsdag.

**The Social Democratic Party**, unlike the Conservatives and the Liberals, was formed outside the Rigsdag. This happened in 1871, and from the beginning the party established a strong party organisation. At first, the main task was to gain as many members as possible. It was only during the 1880s that the party was able to obtain a few seats in the Folketing.

Social developments at the end of the nineteenth century led to a sharper division of society. Common to each of the three parties mentioned above was that they were attached to a given occupational group or class. The Right Wing Party to landed proprietors and civil servants, the United Liberal Party to farmers, and the Social Democratic Party to workers. Moreover, it can be said of both the United Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party that they were part of a more comprehensive organisation or movement, the cooperative movement and the workers' movement respectively. About 1920, these parties and movements played a very important role in the organization of Danish society

A political party is a group of people sharing the same basic beliefs. The people concerned join forces in order to try to influence political developments.

Not everyone could stand for the Rigsdag. Women were excluded from doing so. And so was about a quarter of the male population over the age of thirty. These were mainly servants and recipients of public assistance.

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### Parties in the twentieth century

In 1905, the **Social Liberals** seceded from the Liberals. In 1959, the **Socialist People's Party** was formed after division in the Communist Party. And in 1967, the **Left Wing Socialists** appeared in the form of a breakaway group of the Socialist People's Party. In 1995, the Progress Party split into two sections. The breakaway group formed the **Danish People's Party**. In October 1999, the remaining four Members of the Progress Party seceded from the Party in order to form a new group entitled Freedom 2000. **Freedom 2000** was dissolved in February 2001.

New Alliance appeared in 2007. It was formed by members of the Social Liberals and The Conservatives. In 2008 the party changed its name to **Liberal Alliance**.

**The Unity List - the Red-Green Alliance** originated in a non-parliamentary, electoral cooperation between the Socialist Workers' Party, the Left Wing Socialists, and the Communist Party, but developed into a members' organisation proper, which is independent of the founding parties.

Individual issues led to the formation of parties such as the **Christian Democrats** (formerly the Christian Peoples' Party) and the **Progress Party**. In the former case, it was primarily the Act allowing the sale of pornographic pictures and freer access to abortion that were the decisive factors. In the case of the Progress Party, it was the high level of taxation. At a later date, both parties formulated a policy pertaining to most areas of social life. However, there are also instances in which parties concentrated solely on individual issues such as the **Pensioners' Party** and the **Green Party**. Finally, there are parties and local party lists whose candidates only run in municipal elections and not for the Danish Parliament.

It is no easy matter to obtain the number of signatures required to become eligible to stand as a candidate for the Danish Parliament. Going out into the streets and getting people to sign a registration form is not sufficient. Since 1989 an active effort is required on the part of the person signing the registration form. When the signature has been approved by the national registration office, the registration form is sent back to the signer who must then forward the registration form to the political party in question. And many people never actually do this.

### Composition of the parties

The people who make up the Danish political parties are individuals, not occupational organisations, trade unions or the like. On the other hand, the individual parties try to gain as many members as possible. Therefore, the Danish parties are often referred to as mass parties.

All members join a constituency organisation or caucus. The caucuses help to spread knowledge of the party's policies among the general public, through such means as gaining new members. At the same time, the caucuses back party representatives in municipalities as well as in the Danish Parliament. The major parties have local branches in all municipalities, the smaller parties have branches in the various counties and sometimes only in certain parts of the country. All the local branches together constitute the party's national organisation. If the party has members in the Danish Parliament, they constitute an independent group, the parliamentary group whose members currently hold meetings on the work carried out in the Parliament.

The supreme body of a party is the national congress at which representatives at all levels of the party gather to discuss general political lines. The frequency with which such congresses are held differs from one party to another. They are typically held once a year. The national congress elects an executive committee to deal with the decisions that are to be made between each congress.

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The formation of a number of new parties during the 20th century came about because of a split in the respective parliamentary groups.

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In order to be eligible to stand for Parliament, parties must either have been elected to Parliament beforehand or have collected a number of signatures corresponding to 1/175 of the votes cast at the latest election. In 2007, the number of votes required was 19,185.

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### Establishing party policies

The supreme body or executive committee of a party can adopt statements in which the party takes a stand on a given issue or development. Such statements may either be of a general nature or closely linked to a specific subject.

The parties have different ways of proceeding on the issue of who decides the policy of the party in the Parliament. In some parties, this is done by the members of the parliamentary groups themselves. In others, it is the job of the national organisation and/or the executive committee. Where the Socialist People's Party is concerned, the executive committee takes precedence over the parliamentary group. In the Conservative Party, it is exclusively the parliamentary group that establishes policies in the Parliament.

### The electoral system

The underlying principle of the Danish electoral system is proportional representation. This means that a party is represented in the Danish Parliament in proportion to the number of votes obtained by the party on a nation-wide basis and not only in proportion to the number of votes the candidate of the party in question has obtained in the constituency in which he or she runs for election.

Denmark is divided into ten large constituencies in which the candidates for 135 of the seats in the Danish Parliament are elected. The 40 supplementary seats are distributed on the basis of the number of votes obtained by the parties nationally and they help to ensure that the votes for the party are distributed as equitably as possible. In order to have a share in the supplementary seats, the parties must obtain at least the minimum percentage, i.e. two per cent, of the votes necessary for a party to be represented in Parliament (the threshold rule). This means that the party's points of view must be shared by at least two per cent of the voters, which corresponds to four seats in the Danish Parliament.

### Selection of candidates

The majority of candidates standing for Parliament at a general election stand as representatives of a political party. While candidates who run for a party need only be approved by the party in question, candidates who have no party affiliation must fulfil an additional number of conditions. First, they must be recommended by at least 150 voters in the nomination district. Second, they must obtain at least one of the 135 constituency seats in order to be elected to the Danish Parliament. It is extremely unusual for this to occur.

The parties can choose to nominate their candidates either by district or by parallel nomination. If the former method is used, the candidate receives all the votes that the party in question has obtained in the district, plus the personal votes which he/she has obtained in the various nomination districts comprising the county constituency. This method can be supplemented by nomination by party list, in which the names of the candidates must be prioritised. The selection of candidates is often made by taking a ballot among party members. Only a strong reaction on the part of voters can change the order on the party list.

There is no advance prioritisation of candidates in connection with parallel nomination. The difference between parallel nomination and nomination by district is that votes cast for the party in question are distributed between all the candidates in relation to the personal votes they receive. A majority of the parties makes use of this method of nomination. But the Socialist People's Party has often entered a party list.

### Number of members and election turnout

Today, very few people who vote on election day are members of the party they vote for. It is particularly the "new" parties that have a low organisational percentage. In 2000,

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The supreme body of the Social Democratic Party is called the "Congress". The Conservative Party's supreme body is referred to as the "National Council". The Unity List - the Red-Green Alliance prefers the designation "Annual Meeting". The other parties refer to their supreme bodies as "National Congresses".

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Political parties are not mentioned in the Constitutional Act. However, they were officially included in connection with general elections in the Parliamentary Election Act of 1915.

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Since the 1930s, only Mr Jacob Haugaard has succeeded in entering Parliament as an independent. Mr Haugaard obtained 23,253 personal votes at the 1994 general election.

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the organisational percentage <sup>1)</sup> of the Unity List - Red-Green Alliance was 0.05 and that of the Socialist People's Party 0.16. - The "old" parties do better. The organisational percentage of the Liberal Party, for instance, was 2.5 per cent.

Compared to many other countries, there is a high turnout at general elections in Denmark. Eighty to ninety per cent of the people entitled to vote do so, while the percentage at municipal elections is about seventy.

<sup>1)</sup> What is known as the organisational percentage is the percentage of people who are entitled to vote and who are members of the party in question (Source: Lars Bille, University of Copenhagen). At the single currency referendum, which was held on September 28 2000, 3,999,325 people were entitled to vote.

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Most parties leave it to the constituency organisations or the caucuses in the various districts to nominate the party candidates who will stand for Parliament.

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